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UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT AND CHALLENGES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of out-of-school children in Kaduna State presents a significant barrier to state development, social stability, and economic progress. Despite various interventions, Kaduna State continues to record a high number of out-of-school children, with factors such as poverty, insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and policy inconsistencies contributing to the crisis. This paper explains the concept of out-of-school children, identifying key challenges and assessing the implications for educational and socio-economic growth in Kaduna State. Using recent empirical data and case studies, it explains the effectiveness of current interventions while highlighting gaps that require urgent attention. The study advocates for a holistic approach that includes improved policy formulation and implementation, increased budgetary allocation to education, community participation, and innovative learning solutions such as digital education platforms and vocational training. It also emphasises the need for gender-sensitive policies to ensure equal educational opportunities for girls. Addressing the issue of out-of-school children in Kaduna State requires coordinated efforts from the government, civil society, and international organisations. This paper argues that a multi-sectoral strategy is necessary to mitigate the crisis and achieve the broader goal of universal basic education, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and sustainable educational system in Kaduna State.

Keywords: Challenges, Children, Education, Out-of-School, Quality.

Introduction

Education is universally recognised as a fundamental human right and a crucial driver of individual and national development. It serves as a foundation for social mobility, economic prosperity, and the overall well-being of societies. Despite these acknowledged benefits, Kaduna State faces a significant crisis in its education sector, with an alarming number of children remaining out of school. The complexities surrounding this issue necessitate a multidimensional analysis to fully comprehend its implications, root causes, and potential solutions.

The issue of out-of-school children refers to those of official school-going age who are not enrolled in educational institutions, either due to never having attended school or dropping out before completing the basic education cycle. This problem is most pronounced in developing regions, where socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, security concerns, and systemic infrastructural deficiencies create barriers to education. In Kaduna State, the situation is further exacerbated by political instability, banditry, economic hardship, and inadequate government interventions.

According to the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (2021), recent reports from international organisations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2020) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), Kaduna State accounts for a significant proportion of the out-of-school children in northern Nigeria. The 2024 statistics indicate that approximately 1.5 million children in Kaduna State are not receiving formal education, with girls constituting a significant percentage of this figure. These numbers highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address both immediate and long-term challenges within the state's educational landscape.

The causes of the out-of-school crisis in Kaduna State are multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. Poverty remains one of the most significant determinants of school attendance. Many families, particularly in rural areas, struggle to meet basic needs and prioritise survival over education. In such contexts, children are often required to engage in economic activities to supplement household income, leading to school dropout or non-enrollment. The situation is particularly dire in areas like Birnin Gwari, Kajuru, Giwa, Igabi, Kaduna South and Chikun, where economic hardships and cultural practices further restrict access to formal education, especially for girls.

Insecurity is another critical factor that has contributed to the growing number of out-of-school children in Kaduna State. The state has experienced persistent security challenges, including banditry and kidnapping, which have directly targeted educational institutions. Attacks on schools have instilled fear among parents and students, leading to the closure of many learning centres, particularly in the northern parts of the state. The mass abductions of students from schools in areas like Birnin Gwari, Chikun and Kajuru have further discouraged school attendance and created an atmosphere of uncertainty around the safety of educational institutions.

Furthermore, Kaduna State's education system suffers from severe infrastructural deficiencies and a shortage of qualified teachers. Many schools, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, lack basic amenities such as classrooms, electricity, learning materials, and sanitation facilities (Abdulbaqi et al., 2019; Akorede et al., 2022). This lack of infrastructure diminishes the quality of education and discourages enrollment and retention. Additionally, the shortage of trained educators, coupled with poor remuneration and working conditions, has led to a decline in teaching quality, further exacerbating the crisis (Akorede et al., 2023).

Cultural and religious norms in certain parts of Kaduna State, particularly in the Northern Regions, limit educational opportunities for girls. Early marriage and gender-based discrimination prevent many girls from accessing and completing their education. According to UNICEF, thousands of school-age girls in Kaduna State are either married off at a young age or engaged in household labour, which keeps them out of school. Despite government and non-governmental interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in education, deep-seated societal attitudes continue to pose formidable challenges.

Government policies and funding inadequacies further complicate efforts to address the out-of-school crisis. While Kaduna State has implemented several initiatives to improve education, including the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, implementation remains inconsistent. The state's budgetary allocation to education has historically fallen below the recommended benchmark set by UNESCO, thereby limiting resources available for improving school infrastructure, hiring qualified teachers, and implementing educational reforms. Corruption and mismanagement of education funds have also hampered efforts to expand access to quality education.

Another critical issue is the lack of inclusive education policies that cater to children with disabilities. Many children with physical and intellectual disabilities face significant barriers to education, including inadequate special education facilities and trained personnel. As a result, a large number of children with disabilities remain out of school, further exacerbating the crisis.

Addressing the out-of-school challenge in Kaduna State requires a holistic and multi-pronged approach. Government efforts must be reinforced with community-based interventions, international collaborations, and private sector involvement. Policies aimed at reducing poverty, improving security, and addressing gender disparities should be integrated into broader educational reforms. Additionally, initiatives that provide alternative learning opportunities, such as non-formal education centres, vocational training programs, and technology-driven education solutions, should be expanded to reach out-of-school children.

Innovative educational models, such as Free Education, Nigerian Educational Loan Fund (NELFUND), and scholarship programs, have proven successful in increasing school enrollment in other regions and should be further explored in Kaduna State. Strengthening community engagement and raising awareness about the long-term benefits of education can also contribute to reducing the number of out-of-school children. Moreover, leveraging technology and digital learning platforms can provide alternative education pathways for children who cannot access traditional schooling due to security risks or economic constraints.

However, the issue of out-of-school children in Kaduna State remains a pressing challenge that requires urgent and sustained action. The complexity of this issue demands a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes while simultaneously implementing practical solutions to mitigate the crisis. By prioritising education, investing in infrastructure, ensuring security, and promoting inclusive and gender-sensitive policies, Kaduna State can work towards achieving universal basic education and securing a brighter future for its children.

The issue of out-of-school children remains a significant challenge in Kaduna State, posing serious implications for state development, social stability, and economic growth. Despite various government policies and interventions aimed at improving access to education, hundreds of thousands of children, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions, remain outside the formal school system. This phenomenon is attributed to multiple factors, including poverty, cultural and religious beliefs, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and inadequate government funding for education.

One of the major concerns is the increasing number of children who are unable to access quality education due to economic constraints. Many families, especially in low-income communities, struggle to afford basic educational necessities such as school fees, uniforms, and learning materials, leading to high dropout rates. Additionally, socio-cultural factors, such as early marriage and gender discrimination, further hinder children's enrollment and retention in schools, particularly among girls.

Furthermore, security challenges, including banditry and kidnapping, have led to the displacement of many families, disrupting the education of children and forcing them into street trading, child labour, and other forms of social vices. The inadequacy of school infrastructure, including overcrowded classrooms, a lack of qualified teachers, and poor learning environments, also discourages school attendance and contributes to low literacy levels.

Despite efforts by educational agencies and international organisations to address the crisis, the issue persists due to weak policy implementation, lack of political will, and poor coordination among stakeholders. If left unaddressed, the rising number of out-of-school children will continue to hinder Kaduna State's socio-economic progress, exacerbating unemployment, crime, and social inequalities. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive, well-coordinated, and sustainable approach to ensure that all children have access to quality education, thereby securing the state's future.

The State of Education in Kaduna State

Kaduna State has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in northern Nigeria. According to UNICEF, as of 2021, there were approximately 1.5 million children out of school in Kaduna State (UNICEF, 2021). This situation poses a severe challenge not only to the children affected but also to the state's overall development. An out-of-school child is defined as a child of school age who is not enrolled in any formal educational institution. This includes those who have dropped out of school or have never attended school at all.

Out-of-School Children Index in Kaduna State

As of 2024, Kaduna State faces a significant challenge with a high number of out-of-school children. According to UNICEF, approximately 1.5 million children in Kaduna State are not attending school. This figure includes 800,000 primary school-age children and an additional 700,000 at the junior secondary level. This situation has severe implications for the state's human capital development and economic future. The high number of out-of-school children contributes to increased illiteracy rates, perpetuates poverty, and exacerbates insecurity. Addressing this issue is crucial for Kaduna State's socio-economic development. Efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school children include initiatives by UNICEF and the Kaduna State government, such as developing frameworks to improve school enrollment and retention. However, challenges like insecurity, poverty, and cultural norms continue to hinder progress (Akorede et al., 2022).

Table 1. Detailed showing the Out-of-School Children Index in Kaduna State (2024):

Category	Number of Children (Million)	Percentage (%)	Remarks
Total Out-of-School Children	1.5	100%	Based on UNICEF 2024 data
Primary School Age (6-11)	0.8	53.3%	Majority affected are in rural areas
Junior Secondary Age (12-14)	0.7	46.7%	Higher dropout rates due to insecurity and poverty
Gender Distribution (Boys)	0.7	46.7%	More boys in urban areas attend school.
Gender Distribution (Girls)	0.8	53.3%	Girls face more cultural and economic barriers.
Regional Distribution (Northern Zones)	1.0	66.7%	Highest concentration in conflict-affected areas like Birnin Gwari and Kajuru
Regional Distribution (Southern Zones)	0.5	33.3%	Higher enrollment rates in urban centres like Kaduna City
Key Contributing Factors	-	-	Insecurity, poverty, child labour, and early marriage
Government & NGO Interventions	-	-	UNICEF, Safe School Initiative, UBEC programs

Source: UNICEF. (2021)

This table provides a structured overview of the Out-of-School Children crisis in Kaduna State and highlights key demographics and interventions.

Reasons behind the Increase in Out-of-School Children

Several factors contribute to the high number of out-of-school children in Kaduna State. These factors can be broadly categorised into economic, cultural, social, and geographic influences.

Economic Factors: Poverty is a significant barrier to education for many families in Kaduna State. The majority of families in rural areas struggle to meet basic needs, and education is often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. Parents may choose to keep their children, particularly those of school age, at home to contribute to household income through labour (Abdulbaqi et al., 2024; World Bank, 2020).

Cultural Influences: Cultural misconceptions about education, especially for girls, significantly hinder enrollment. In some communities, girls are expected to marry young and assume domestic roles instead of pursuing education. This cultural predilection perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Social Factors: The ongoing conflict and insecurity in various regions of Kaduna State, particularly in areas like Birnin Gwari and Kajuru, have resulted in school closures and the displacement of families. Children from these conflict-torn areas face enormous challenges in accessing education (Brookings Institution, 2018).

Geographic Disparities: There is a stark contrast in access to education in urban and rural areas. Many rural areas lack schools, and those that do are often under-resourced and overcrowded. The distance to the nearest school is often too far for children to travel safely, especially in remote communities (UNESCO, 2020).

Health and Disability: Health issues, including malnutrition and disease, can inhibit children's ability to learn and attend school (Akorede et al., 2022). Additionally, children with disabilities face significant barriers to education. Inadequate facilities and support systems further alienate these children, resulting in higher rates of school dropout (Akorede et al., 2022).

Challenges of Out-of-School Children in Kaduna State

Apart from the issues spelt out under the statement of the problem, additional challenges for out-of-school children are encountered. Among the challenges of Out-of-School Children in Kaduna State, these are multifaceted and deeply rooted in socio-economic, cultural, and security issues. Here are the key challenges:

1. **Insecurity and Conflict**
   i. Ongoing banditry and kidnapping in areas like Birnin Gwari and Kajuru have led to school closures.
   ii. Communal clashes and farmer-herder conflicts disrupt education.
2. **Poverty and Economic Hardship**
   i. Many families cannot afford school fees, uniforms, or learning materials.
   ii. Children are forced into child labour to support family income.
3. **Cultural and Religious Barriers**
   i. Gender disparity: Many communities prioritise boys' education over girls'.
   ii. Early marriage among girls, especially in northern Kaduna, reduces school attendance.
4. **Weak Educational Infrastructure**
   i. The lack of schools in rural areas forces children to travel long distances.
   ii. Overcrowded classrooms due to inadequate school facilities.
5. **Poor Government Policies and Implementation**
   i. Universal Basic Education (UBE) is not fully enforced or monitored.
   ii. Corruption in education funding limits school development projects.
6. **Poor Learning Environment**
   i. Many schools lack toilets, clean water, and electricity.
   ii. Poor teaching quality leads to low motivation among students.
7. **Lack of Awareness and Parental Engagement**
   i. Some parents do not value formal education, especially in rural areas.
   ii. Low literacy levels among parents mean they cannot support their children's learning.
8. **Displacement and Migration**
   i. Internal displacement due to conflicts leaves children without stable schooling.
   ii. Urban migration leads to street children who do not attend school.

Consequences of Out-of-School Children

The consequences of having hundreds of thousands of children out of school in Kaduna State are dire and multifaceted. Firstly, education is intrinsically linked to economic development. A less educated workforce can lead to lower productivity, hampering Kaduna State's economic growth. Moreover, children who do not receive an education are more likely to remain in poverty as adults, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019). Secondly, there are significant social implications. Out-of-school children are more susceptible to being involved in criminal activities, exploitation, and child labour. Their lack of education makes them easy targets for human trafficking and recruitment by extremist groups, further exacerbating insecurity and social unrest (UNODC, 2018). Lastly, the widespread absence of education undermines democratic practices. An uneducated populace is less likely to make informed decisions during elections or participate meaningfully in governance. This disconnect can lead to poor political leadership and governance, as those in power may not feel accountable to an uninformed citizenry.

Future Prospects

While significant challenges remain in addressing the plight of out-of-school children in Kaduna State, there are glimmers of hope. With continued advocacy, funding, and community support, there is potential for real progress. Better data collection and analysis will also help to design effective interventions tailored to specific

regions and demographics (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2021). Moreover, collaboration between the government, non-profit organisations, and international agencies is crucial. A multi-faceted approach that includes economic incentives for families, improved school infrastructure, and awareness campaigns will comprehensively tackle the issue of out-of-school children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of out-of-school children in Kaduna State is a complex issue that stems from various economic, social, cultural, and geographic factors. The challenges posed by this situation are profound and impact not just the children affected but also the state as a whole. To bring about meaningful change, a concerted effort is required from all segments of society. With the right strategies and commitment from various stakeholders, it is possible to reduce the number of out-of-school children in Kaduna State and ensure that every child can exercise their right to education.

Recommendations

In response to the growing number of out-of-school children, the Kaduna State government, NGOs, and international organisations have launched various initiatives aimed at improving access to education. The following are the suggestions:

Policy Reforms: The Kaduna State government should introduce policies aimed at free and compulsory primary education to encourage more children to attend school. However, the effectiveness of these policies often falters due to inadequate infrastructure and resources.

Alternative Education Programmes: To reach out-of-school children, various non-governmental organisations should implement alternative education programmes. These programs often provide flexible learning schedules and are designed to accommodate the specific needs of children who cannot attend traditional schools (Plan International, 2020).

Community Engagement: Engaging communities in the importance of education, particularly for girls, has shown promise. Awareness campaigns aim to change cultural perceptions and encourage families to prioritise education.

Safe Learning Environments: In regions affected by violence and insecurity, creating safe spaces for children to learn is crucial. NGOs and the United Nations should mobilise support to ensure that schools are protected from attacks and serve as refuges for displaced children.

International Support: Several international bodies, such as UNICEF and the World Bank, should provide financial and logistical support toward educational initiatives in Kaduna State. These organisations aim to strengthen the education system and ensure more children receive quality education.

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